



## District Child Welfare Demonstrates Good Performance and Improvement Strategies Underway

On November 21, 2011, Court Monitor Judith Meltzer released the “*LaShawn A. v. Gray* Progress Report for the Period January 1-June 30, 2011.” This is the Court Monitor’s first report on District child welfare performance under the Implementation and Exit Plan (IEP), which went into effect in December 2010. (The Monitor’s previous report released in May 2011, covered a performance period that pre-dated the IEP.) The current report covers the final five months in the tenure of DC Child and Family Services Agency Director Roque Gerald and first month of leadership by Interim Director Debra Porchia-Usher. Following are CFSA’s primary insights about the report.

### Overall Progress

A performance leap, several areas of significant improvement, and performance trending in the right direction on standards the Court Monitor assessed add up to good progress. Strategies CFSA launched two or three years ago are now bearing fruit. Continuing that momentum, we expect to see the impact of strategies underway on areas in need of improvement over the next several months.

### Strengths

- **Strong performance in monitoring child safety.** Fully 92% to 96% of children at home and in foster care got regular visits from their social worker, a key factor in maintaining child safety.
- **Timely completion of child abuse/neglect investigations.** CFSA completion of 89% to 93% of investigations within 30 days substantially met or exceeded the goal of 90%.
- **Success of two-year push to increase permanence.** The Court Monitor conducted a case record review to determine whether CFSA was making reasonable efforts to complete adoptions within 12 months of placing children in pre-adoptive homes. This revealed that for children adopted between January and June 2011, 96% were either adopted within 12 months of placement in a pre-adoptive home or were receiving diligent attention from social workers to achieve legal finalization of their adoption. A key finding was the tireless persistence of social workers in seeking permanence for children, even when preparing them for adoption and identifying adoptive homes took years.
- **Performance leap in serving youth in care.** Number of youth in care with a formal plan to prepare for adulthood jumped from 50% in the last half of CY10 to 90% in the first half of CY11—a 40% increase. This is one of several good returns on a three-year investment to improve services for older youth.
- **Priority to improve health care pays off.** Fully 97% of children in the system had prompt access to health care, exceeding the goal of 80%. CFSA also showed improved performance in ensuring all children get a health screening before entering foster care and a full medical and dental evaluation within 30 days of entering care.
- **More children stable in foster homes.** Bouncing around from home to home in foster care is detrimental to children. CFSA is meeting goals for children who experience no more than two different placements.
  - Children in care for 12 months or less: 81% stable (goal = 83%)

- Children in care for 12 to 24 months: 59% stable (goal = 60%)
- Children in care for more than 24 months: 76% stable (goal = 75%) for the past 12 months

## In Need of Improvement

- **Remove barriers to placement with kin.** CFSA is exploring how to increase efficiency in licensing a child's relatives. This includes working to forge a first-ever border agreement with Maryland that will expedite placement of children across jurisdictional lines. This will help with the local demographic reality that extended family of many children in District care reside in Prince Georges County, MD.
- **Expand services for older youth.** More than one in four children in District care is age 18 or older, and ensuring a smooth transition for them out of care at age 21 is a key goal for CFSA. We have stepped up recruitment of youth to participate in the Ansell-Case Life Skills Assessment at age 15 and in Youth Transition Planning (YTP) at age 17.5. In addition, CFSA recently issued contracts to two private providers to assist up to 400 youth in developing life skills, completing high school, taking part in post-secondary education or training, and gaining work experience.
- **Strengthen performance-based contracting.** Following a complete revamp of our contract monitoring function, CFSA is conducting quarterly evaluations of provider performance in meeting contract requirements, which include some specific outcomes for youth. We are also ensuring that providers establish internal quality assurance programs.
- **Meet priorities for data collection.** New and altered requirements in the Implementation and Exit Plan (compared to previous court-approved plans) have meant CFSA must change some approaches to collecting and reporting performance information. We set priorities for revisions to the computer system and are working to complete those changes as fast as current resources allow.

## Conclusion

The District's most vulnerable children, youth, and families need a strong, efficient, and effective safety net. CFSA continues to pursue high standards in providing the support these people deserve.